

Message Text

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12
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TAGS: PINT, PFOR, SP, VT
SUBJ: CHURCH/STATE WRAP UP - RECENT ROME VISIT OF JUSTICE
MINISTER

REF: A. MADRID 2862 B. MADRID 1881

SUMMARY: RECENT VISIT TO ROME BY JUSTICE MINISTER AND HIS
TALKS WITH OPOE AND OTHER HIGH VATICAN OFFICIALS MAY HAVE
SOMEWHAT IMPROVED CLIMATE BETWEEN GOS AND VATICAN FOLLOWING
MONTH IN WHICH SPANISH CHURCH/STATE RELATIONS HAVE BEEN
SEVERELY STRAINED. ALTHOUGH UNLIKELY TO LEAD TO ANY PROGRESS
ON STALLED CONCORDAT NEGOTIATIONS, JUSTICE MINISTER'S TALKS
COULD LEAD TO AGREEMENT ON DESIGNATION OF EIGHT NEW BISHOPS
FOR LONG-VACANT SEES. END SUMMARY.

1. FROM MAY 26-28 NEW JUSTICE MINISTER SANCHEZ VENTURA HEADED
AN OFFICIAL SPANISH DELEGATION TO ROME TO ATTEND CANNONIZATION
CEREMONIES FOR TWO NEWLY-PROCLAIMED SPANISH SAINTS. WHILE IN
ROME HE WAS RECEIVED IN PRIVATE AUDIENCE BY POPE AND ALSO
HELD SEPARATE TALKS WITH VATICAN SECY OF STATE CARDINAL
VILLOT AND WITH LATTER'S PRINCIPAL ASSISTANTS, MSGRS. CASAROLI
AND BENELLI.

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ALTHOUGH BILLED AS MERE COURTESY CALLS, THESE DISCUSSIONS HAD

SPECIAL SIGNIFICANCE IN VIEW OF RESPONSIBILITY OF MINISTRY OF JUSTICE FOR CHURCH/STATE RELATIONS. THESE TALKS ARE REPORTED TO HAVE RANGED OVER THE GAMUT OF SPANISH CHURCH/STATE RELATIONS, INCLUDING SUCH TOPIC AS CURRENT AND RECENT CONFLICTS AS WELL AS THE LONG-STALLED CONCORDAT NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN THE GOS AND VATICAN. DAY BEFORE RECEIVING JUSTICE MINISTER, POPE HAD PRIVATE MEETING WITH MADRID CARDINAL TARANCON, R PRESIDENT OF THE SPANISH EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE.

2. JUSTICE MINISTER'S CALL ON POPE FOLLOWED UPON ONE OF MOST AGITATED MONTHS IN CHURCH/STATE RELATIONS SINCE THE FEBRUARY 1974 BISHOP ANOVEROS CRISIS. MAY WAS THUS MARKED BY: (A) SERIES OF BEATINGS OF PRIESTS AND ATTACKS ON CHURCH PROPERTY IN VARIOUS SPANISH CITIES, PARTICULARLY IN BASQUE PROVINCES, BY EXTREMIST RIGHTISTS WHO APPEAR TO ACT WITH IMPUNITY AND AT TIME PERHAPS IN COLLUSION WITH SOME ELEMENTS OF POLICE AND SECURITY FORCES; (B) ARRESTS AND HEAVY FINES LEVIED BY GOVT AGAINST VARIOUS ACTIVIST PRIESTS, MANY OF WHOM SYMPATHETIC TO BASQUE SEPARATISM; AND (C) THE LAST-MINUTE PROHIBITION BY THE CIVIL GOVERNOR OF LAS PALMAS ON MAY 10 OF AN ASSEMBLY OF CANARY ISLAND PRIESTS AND LAITY WHICH HAD BEEN CONVOKED BY THE LOCAL BISHOP, MSGR. INFANTES, REPEATING GOVT'S MARCH PROHIBITION OF A SIMILAR ASSEMBLY PLANNED FOR MADRID WORKING CLASS DISTRICT (REF B).

3. DETERIORATING CHURCH/STATE CLIMATE LED PERMANENT COMMITTEE OF EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE TO ISSUE MAY 22 STRONG STATEMENT CONDEMNING ALL VIOLENCE, WHETHER PERPETRATED IN DEFENSE OF SUPPOSED IDEALS OR IN THE NAME OF PUBLIC ORDER, AND WHICH ADDITIONALLY REASSERTED CHURCH'S RIGHT TO PREACH GOSPEL AS IT SEES FIT EVEN THOUGH THIS MAY IMPINGE UPON THE STATE'S TEMPORAL DOMAIN. THIS EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE REPRIMAND TO GOVT FOLLOWED UPON HEELS OF SIMILARLY CRITICAL EPISCOPAL DOCUMENT ON RECONCILIATION (REF A) IN APRIL.

4. COMMENT: ACCORDING TO SOURCE IN NUNCIATURE, POPE'S TALKS WITH SANCHEZ VENTURA DO NOT SIGNIFY ANY NEW BREAKTHROUGH IN THE LONG-STALLED CONCORDAT NEGOTIATIONS, NOR CAN ANY DRAMATIC REDUCTION IN CHURCH/STATE CONFLICTS WITHIN SPAIN BE EXPECTED AS A RESULT OF THE TALKS. HOWEVER, SOURCE ADDED LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THAT VATICAN WAS IMPRESSED BY JUSTICE MINISTER'S APPARENTLY SINCERE AND FORTHCOMING ATTITUDE AND HIS EXPRESSED DESIRE TO SEEK TO REDUCE CHURCH/STATE FRICTIONS IN SPAIN. THEY BELIEVE THAT THEY WILL FIND NEW JUSTICE MINISTER MUCH MORE FLEXIBLE THAN HIS HARD LINE PREDECESSOR, RUIZ JARABO. THIS NEW RAPPORT WITH JUSTICE MINISTER, ACCORDING TO SOURCE, IS IN THE SHORT RUN MOST LIKELY TO LEAD TO VATICAN AND GOS AGREEMENT IN DESIGNATION OF BISHOPS FOR EIGHT SPANISH DIOCESES WHICH ARE

NOW VACANT.

5. MORE QUESTIONABLE, HOWEVER, WHETHER SOMEWHAT IMPROVED
CLIMATE BETWEEN GOS AND VATICAN STEMMING FROM JUSTICE MINISTER'S
ROME VISIT MAY BE TRANSLATED INTO A MORE CONCILIATORY ATTITUDE
BY PUBLIC ORDER AUTHORITIES TOWARDS THE CHURCH, OR MAY ENCOURAGE
GOVT TO RESTRAIN ATTACKS AGAINST PRIESTS AND CHURCH PROPERTIES
BY ULTRA RIGHTIST GROUPS.
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